

# The Spiritual Growth in the Land and the Role of the State

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Dear readers. I greet you today with the first Poya sermon of the year 2003. Mind you, all of us have already stepped into the third year of this new century. And equally well into the new millennium.

At this stage, let us ask ourselves whether we Sri Lankans have any yardsticks left with us with which to measure our progress? It is our firm conviction that people in this country **are rapidly being taught to lose our sensitivity** to every such thing. We are **efficiently learning the art of not adhering to any norms or standards** in anything.

In our country we have at the moment an **insensibly diversified leadership** in every sphere, whether it be politics, educational reforms in the land, or inculcation of religious and moral values among the people. This has led to there being in our midst **countless heterogeneous groups of questionable competence as well as unacceptable honesty and authenticity.**

The seriousness of this situation is not even sensed or felt among the men and women who, **with their leadership in the country**, should know better. Parents are **helplessly stupefied**, and political leadership of the country who are caught up in their maddening craze for power are **artfully oblivious** to the evils of these. The religious and ethnic fanatics of all ranks **have no more need to think** of these.

It is religious sermons, we believe, from the Buddhist *dharma sālās*, from the Hindu temples, from the churches and from the mosques, i.e. of any and every denomination in this country, which must necessarily focus attention on these issues and make impartial judgements to enlighten the people of the land as a whole. We hope we are all doing it with adequate honesty and sincerity.

As things are in our country today, if we do not turn our attention at our own selves, even from time to time, I warn you, specially those at the very top who are policy makers for others, we shall never reach our journey's end safely, without catastrophic explosions in mid-air.

I express these ideas as a preamble to my sermon because I wish to talk to you and talk with you, not merely as a Buddhist monk but as some one who wishes to relate Buddhist thinking to human problems of the world. They may pertain to drug addiction and alcoholism, abortion and unmarried mothers, sex assaults of all sorts, industrial development and consequent environmental pollution, and finally to child care in the home and growth of love.

Buddhists have a very well developed system of thinking about man and the universe. The Buddhists speak about their genesis and their inter-relatedness. For instance about man and the ecosystem around us. As Buddhists, we have a vision of the totality of the universe, not merely of a world with a sun and moon created for us. One must remember that a correct grasp of these amounts approximately to a correct grasp of the reality of the world. It is this and this alone which enables man to adjust his life correctly and harmoniously to the world he lives in.

Even though from a very different religious and cultural angle, see how an eminent American psychologist like M. Scott Peck speaks of this subject: **The more clearly we see the reality of the world, the better equipped we are to deal with the world. The less clearly we see the reality of the world – the more our minds are befuddled by falsehood, misperceptions and illusions – the less able we will be to determine correct courses of action and make wise decisions** [The Road Less Traveled, p. 44].

A correct vision of the world is a basic requirement for mankind, wherever they be or to whichever creed they belong. The **Buddhists have to be able** to say in one voice, that they **see clearly the reality of the world**. This, the Buddhists call

**correct vision**, or **more precisely corrected vision**. In their own language, the Buddhists call it *sammā diṭṭhi*. It is with this alone that they, or any others from outside, can claim membership to Buddhism as a living faith.

This is not a mere believing in the sanctity of a revelation. One subjects this belief to one's own scrutiny, after one has taken to the Path of Wisdom. Its acquisition is precisely worded in Buddhist texts as *parato ghoso*, i.e. one hears the teachings from another and *yoniso ca manasikāro*, one wisely reflects on it. At this stage, I insist that this process has to be **personalized**, i.e. the truth of the teaching has to be **actualized in one's own life**. It cannot remain a mere article of belief or faith. As profound wisdom for the Buddhist, it is *paccattam veditabbo viññūhi* = it is some thing to be realized by the wise, each by himself.

Correcting our view of the world is no easy task. It needs considerable effort. M. Scott Peck whom we just quoted above has this to say about it: **'While this is obvious, it is something that most people to a greater or lesser degree choose to ignore. They ignore it because our route to reality is not easy.'** But we do need to develop an applicable view of the world. Here we strongly feel that it is best that each religion, through its love of humanity, does it within its own flock rather than encroach on others, via ways which at times, are less honourable than they should really be.

To the Buddhist, orthodox or unorthodox, that route to reality must necessarily be the *dharma*. That *dharma is the world view* which **the Buddha**, through his enlightenment, **revealed to us**. Its core is *tilakkhaṇa* - consisting of the three-fold characteristics of life and the world, namely impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness.

That 'all is not well with the world' means that it is under great stress, i.e. stress of birth, decay, disease and death to which all humans are subject: *jāyati ca jīyati ca mīyati ca*. Also being born again: *cavati ca uppajjati ca* [Ibid.] More so stressful, because it is not confined to a single narrow space between birth and

death. Birth and death are only markings on a long and continuous recurrent process.

Further, the stress of the world is not terminated in death or with death. In the world of Buddhist thinking, the much talked about **Euthanasia** of today **is no meaningful answer to pain**. Nor is **suicide an answer**, no matter who sponsors or condones it.

It is now becoming more and more evident to us that there are supersonic new currents of thinking about Buddhism in the air in Sri Lanka today, a product obviously of the presently fashionable neo-intellectualism in religious thinking. Buddhists truly do not need this. Preachers from all walks of life, particularly lay ones, perhaps divinely commissioned, how and by whom we can easily guess,, seem to be indulging in this kind of activity and relishing it because of the solicited or unsolicited vast patronage they get out of it.

All grades of learned and less learned personnel, professional and non-professional, flock to them.

It is from these new sources that strange ideas about near-death-experience, life beyond death, interim existences or *antarābhava*, *saṃsāra* and Nibbāna and even certain modes of distrust with regard to rebirth seem to emerge. These fanciful modernists in the Buddhist world of Sri Lanka today seem to be sporting around far too much in the playing fields of Buddhist studies, **particularly those established privately in their own homes** and jumping too many high hurdles in Bhāvanā Centres, without even any awareness of *saṃsāra* and rebirth and the controlling factors which lie behind them.

Our advise to them, in all seriousness, would be to turn in the direction of a serious study of the basics of the Dhamma from the original suttas, with reliable assistance sought wherever necessary. And certainly not from any and every monk and lay champions who claim they have already reached their enlightenment through their own mysterious ways.

This is where primarily a knowledge of the dhamma, which is the Buddha's own discovery, must come in. This must be followed by a deep conviction about its correctness and its total efficiency. We discover these days, at every turn, strange new meanings given to standard Pali words like *sotāpanna*, *sandiṭṭhika*, *akālika*, *ehi-passika* by people who know much less Pali than they should really know, if they were going to be popular teachers of the dhamma, to be of any use to anybody.

The discovery of this dhamma was no easy task even for the Buddha. It was with difficulty and after a great deal of experimenting and trying out that he gained it. *Kicchena me adhi-gataṃ*, he says: It was with difficulty I gained it. But disbelievers of the dhamma, there could be many, in spite of its very high degree of credibility. The Buddha knew it too. The Buddha said that the truth is so very different to what the people are accustomed to believe in. It runs upstream [*paṭisotagāmiṃ*], against the downward flow of the current.

It is the nature of the world to grab at things that come their way and seduce and entice them. Our being caught in this ensnaring is what is normally called the **gratification of the senses** or sense desires. Psychologists in the world today are agreed that deliberate delaying of this process of activity of the humans has a therapeutic value. Hence the re-introduction into modern society of ancient concepts like **restraint** and **discipline**. This new trend is becoming popular and widely accepted in the western world, particularly in the U.S.A., at least among men and women of greater maturity and sobriety. Thus **delay gratification** has become a mode of modern psychotherapy.

Now let us turn our attention to the Buddhist concept of **dhamma** and see where it applies to the building up of a healthy and realistic world view. Or in other words come to know the reality of the world. On the one hand, there is the world or the universe we live in. The good and bad things of the universe are a part of itself. Earth quakes and volcanic eruptions, floods and typhoons, are not the expression of vendetta of an angry god, creator or destroyer. The sooner

man understands, through his own scientific analysis, these as part of natural phenomena, the better equipped will he be to avoid such disasters.

To the Buddhist, they are patterns of behaviour or *niyāma* which are to be expected. They may pertain to the realm of the universe or the realm of man. Through the adequacy of our own searches and researches, when we are able today to warn men at sea and men in the air, or men on land in the vicinity of troublous spots, are we passing on secret information to them of the vicious moods of an angry god? No. We are predictably aware of what is impending, and are therefore in a better position of defense, rather than depend on moody temperaments of higher powers who insist on our prayers and supplications and humans are lamentably made to kneel down in prayer to secure their survival.

Having taken a look at the universe and activities therein, and disciplined ourselves to take a realistic view of them, let us now turn our attention to man, to man at a very down-to-earth level. Whether we take him from Sri Lanka or out of a global context, it matters very little. Let us make Sri Lanka our center of study. I am keen on taking an overall view of our human community. Admittedly I am going to use a Buddhist yard-stick. My task is only for a diagnostic purpose.

My search spreads over three areas. 1. The health of the people, both physical and mental, is of primary importance. 2. I am also interested in the economic wellbeing of the land which, we are inclined to think, has dropped to a lowest-ever and has acquired a serious morbidity, perhaps through international pressures and our own narrow-viewed miscalculations. They do certainly need relentless scrutiny and ruthless scanning by persons who know, not only about money, but also know about men, i.e. about the human commodity they venture to handle. And finally 3. the governance of the people of the land and how it is done and for whose sake, is becoming a top priority of study. But I have my doubts whether we can handle them all at one sitting.

The health of the people matters most. All the world over, people with any

sanity as individuals or governments, are interested in this. A good part of world surveys and research are turned in this direction. The greatest gain of man is good health, says Buddhism: *ārogyaparamā labhā*. When America discovered in 1994 that nearly 49 % of hospitalization of males and 43 % hospitalization of females in that country during the previous year were alcohol-related, those at the top in charge of the health of the country, the Chief Surgeon Joslyn Elders, insisted that **duties on alcohol be immediately increased**. Such sensitivity in the interest of national priorities is truly commendable by any standard. But **our endeavour here in Sri Lanka to knock illicit brews out of the land by reducing the price of better quality alcohol and popularising their consumption may be a questionable venture.**

It is all too well known to everyone, both here and abroad, that the most devastating areas in the pathology of the Sri Lankan community today is generated through the recklessness of our own human agency. The **ease with which alcohol, tobacco and even drugs are circulated and can be obtained in this country** is amazing. It is as though there are hardly any restricted areas.

Decades ago, the introduction of opium to China was looked upon as the bestial manipulation of villainous groups. But today, with better developed mutual political loyalties, do people speak of scruples or the villainy of the beast as one sights these menacing items of tobacco and alcohol being sold at elitist sales-points in the city or at the suburban distribution centers of the underworld tycoons? The numbers of these, by whatever name you call them have been openly seen increasing with scandalous rapidity for reasons better known to those above than to those below. It is an open secret that those at the top do not wish to worry their heads about it. This is the thuggery of economics as well as politics of today.

Let us honestly ask each other now at this stage as to whom we can or should sensitize on these issues. Our leadership in this country, whether in the home or in the state, are throwing up their arms in despair, and laying bare their

impotence in these matters. They appear to be as if they really do not know what and where the malady is, or as to how all this was brought about here in this country. Even if one did make a correct diagnosis, there are all manner of difficulties which prevent any kind of cures or remedies being prescribed. Or any corrective measures being implemented. Prosecution and punishment in our state of anarchy seems a thing of the past.

On these issues, we definitely feel proud of countries like Singapore and Malaysia, who without straining to subscribe to -isms of outmoded ideologies of donor countries, place in the forefront of their planning and policy-making the welfare of their people and their own land?

No one is unaware of the menacing ill-effects of these new introductions into our Sri Lankan society, in newer doses, and with far greater publicity given by our affluent and prosperous media. As health hazards they top the list. Statistics relating to hospitalization quoted above from the U.S.A. prove the point. If one needs such data in more exciting format, they can very well be collected from Sri Lanka. But when we get them, and are called upon to face them square, we have a way of putting the telescope to the blind eye. Do we want to keep fooling the people all the time with make-believe excuses.

If religions and religious injunctions are seriously understood, without their followers and their exponents over-concentrating on their ritual super-structures, the very statement in Buddhist teachings that good health is the greatest gain of mankind [*ārogya-paramā lābhā*] is vibrant enough to alert the entire state machinery to awaken them to enlist the support the people of the land to safeguard the health of the nation by knocking alcohol and tobacco out of the land. There indeed lies the wealth of the nation, in their own good health, and not in the pockets of a few privileged tycoons who come forward from time to time to finance state ventures.

Safeguarding the people of the land in this area, keeping them away from the



devastation caused through drugs, alcohol and tobacco is well enjoined in the fifth precept of the Buddhist *pañca-sīla*. Under *surāmeraya-majja-pamādaṭṭhānā veramanī*, everyone, man or woman, must endeavour to keep away from such situations of addiction which robs one of one's good health, sanity and good judgement.

We certainly uphold that it is the duty of the state to provide the right environment for this kind of sane and civilized living. Tube-wells are well advised in the waterless dry zone areas. But certainly not tube-wells which syphon out alcohol in our own land and pump in much more from the world outside. We know that the state is much richer by this process but the country is certainly degraded and people depraved. A plea in this direction is by no means on behalf of any religious sentimentalism. It is a plea for civilized living by any world standard, even of countries which uphold the ideals of bread and wine. Alcohol degrades much more than you wish to imagine. There is no gainsaying that.

Let us now pick another spot in the area of health in Sri Lanka for closer scrutiny. Here again, let us not sweep these under the carpet every time we detect them. Callous disregard of moral and ethical values which are offered by all religions has led to calamitous results in the region of sex and sexual life in the country. The relationship between the males and the females in the human community, not of those in the Dehiwala Zoo, have reached the lowest depths. I do not need to detail them out here. People of all grades here, including the educated and the elite, must be imagining that they are emulating best world standards. In their aberrant sex behaviour, they must be imagining that they have reached the high-water mark level of developed western countries.

Far from it. Let it be known that at least sections of teenage girls in America have now reached a stage of maturity and wisdom to be able to boldly say in public, and that to their boy friends in particular, that sex is something worth waiting for. This sanity and this restraint is coming up and growing now, at least in the western world. Perhaps a ray of hope, even in a small way. These

concepts flourished in India more than two thousand years ago, particularly in Buddhist teachings, and was referred to as youthful chastity or *komāra-brahmacariya*. This implies the ban on or rejection of pre-marital sex. To reject this, we now see, an honest endeavour is emerging at least in sections of American society.

It is only in very broad outline that we have been able to indicate how and where spiritual growth in the land should be stimulated and the extent to which the state should step in to foster and nurture it. We call upon all listeners, irrespective of religious differences, who are interested in this subject to get in touch with us so that we may band ourselves together for a worthy cause. My telephone number is 689388

May all beings be well and happy. May there be peace on earth and goodwill among men.



## Additional Notes

They say in English that the test of the pudding is in the eating. The world up to now, both in the east and the west, had dismissed with scant respect what would be deemed propriety of sex relationships. Yes. And in the process they have gathered a bumper harvest. As we march through the new century and the new millennium, think of the millions who would be plunged into **a bottomless abyss through diseases caused by sexual promiscuity. Names like Aids, STD and HIV are not mere meaningless labels. People today, particularly in Sri Lanka are trying to adopt that attitude.**

But as a scourge, they are very real in the world today. Very much more so in Sri Lanka where they are retributively effective. For the fellows of this land have been told of the ill effects of sexual misbehaviour for well over twenty three

centuries. As children more than sixty seventy years ago, we have seen them graphically painted on temple walls that sexual miscreants would be born in the glades of sword-blade pines or *asi-pat vanaya* [*asi-patta-vana*] or in the cauldron of molten lava called *lo-kumbu niraya* [*loha-kumbi niraya*].

In Sri Lanka today, we do not need those temple murals any more. Call for the statistics relating to this area of disasters of liberal sex and have them vividly displayed on school notice boards, in common rooms and refectories of both governmental and private work places, where we know a lot of canvassing goes on for free sex during lunch hour recess. Not only canvassing but even indulgence. We know some of the places where these actually happen, and we are definitely ashamed that they are socially so high up in the ladder.

These disastrous areas of unmarried mothers and therefore of unwanted children and the consequent need for abortion, STD or sexually transmitted diseases, HIV and the horror of all horrors in Aids are all well known to everyone. It is not even in Sri Lanka, but very much in Sri Lanka. A socio-cultural analysis of the distribution of their victims can be very illuminating. Are we not ashamed at national and state level that we keep farming, like poultry and pigs, up to ten to fifteen thousand male prostitutes to provide the cheapest bed, break-fast and boys at international tourist level? Do you know that such advertisements appeared in German news papers? How long more are we to keep on saying that we have misplaced or lost our law-enforcement tool bags? While we talk in this vein, one might suggest that it is more sympathetic and more in keeping with the times to talk in defense of Aids and homosexuals. Do what you will. They have both crossed your threshold in Sri Lanka. We ceremonially grieve over Hiroshima victims but not over what lies at our door step.

What I have outlined for you so far is the area of pathology of sex in this paradise country. You will soon realize that under these circumstances, one would be compelled to undertake an expulsion from paradise in the very near future. Identify the old Adam and let all join together to do the needful. Take yet

another look at sex in Sri Lanka. What of the bestial criminality in that area? Gang rapes perpetrated by teenage groups, by youngsters nearer thirteen than nineteen. And these actually performed within a room in the school premises, on the school stage behind the curtain as it were, and within the city of Greater Colombo. We also read of a second performance of the same drama in a town north of Colombo. If the law of the land has to grin in the face of an offense of this sort, calling it juvenile delinquency, it makes a great deal of sense then to drag the school authorities to court for neglect of children under their care. It is encouragement for the growth of gang villainy on one side, and the exposure to violence of unprotected persons on the other, both of which must strictly come under the purview of the school authorities. And what of the role of parents as citizens of the land?

As crimes, these may not be politically exciting. But they are extremely serious crimes all the same. There is no vendetta at all in tracking them down. One cannot take here too seriously the concern about prosecuting or defending in terms of one's party alliances. What of the monstrous sexual assaults at domestic levels, fathers on their own progeny? Gentlemen of the Jury, even if the hangman's noose has been attacked by white ants through long periods of disuse or the *Ellun Gaha* has been cut down and used up for firewood in somebody's kitchen, there should certainly be some form of law enforcement left in this country. One must not make Sri Lanka a fool's paradise or paradise of fools.

In this sermon I have attempted to present a brief to you. In this, there is a prima facie case for serious action at the highest level of the state and the nation. It is not my determination to prosecute. There is evidence much more than one needs. Do not try to buy up witnesses or bribe any into silence. Realize what is at stake. Men and women of this country, both young and old, and even the unborn, are thus being brutally massacred with more than surface to air missiles. They are daily being led to the most monstrous ways of living, in eating, drinking, sex

and entertainment. Relax, detach yourself and then take a look. It is through misguided notions of economic development, indiscreet international alliances and abominably misplaced generousities, loyalties and priorities. Over decades of neglect, today it brings forth the foulest brew in the land, in every walk of life . Certainly it is not *Kasippu* alone.

In situations like this, it has been the wisdom of the ages to take a serious and dispassionate look at traditional values and bring in a touch of spirituality to the scene. By spirituality I do not mean mere worship and prayer, invoking the merely believed-in powers. It is enlarged and modified forms of thinking of humans which get beyond mere thoughts of food and clothing. Of forms of living with a greater dimension. While the more advanced countries and nations in the world are turning towards a little more re-forestation in this direction, we are recklessly heading in the direction of desertification. We are on the brink of total desecration. Art and literature in the world today, and more so in Sri Lanka than any where else, have all their tools whetted against traditional values and spirituality. Attempts at re-writing history now being undertaken in many parts of the world among resurgent nations, tend to upset the balance of laws of natural evolution, of harmonious self-adjustment and peaceful co-existence which humanity is expected to know all the time.

Even the mythical rulers of India in the person of Universal Monarchs or *Cakkavatti* kings set the model for us in getting their vassals to endeavour to establish moral order and social justice within their own domains rather than pressurize them to restructure their political setups. In the world of the ancients, all political -isms had to head in the direction of human welfare and not power building. Within every state, life in every form, whether of man or animal, had to be safe-guarded, right of property had to be honoured, sex being recognized as the very basis of life in the world, propriety of relations between the males and the females, at all ages and at all levels had to be respected. Degeneracy of human efficiency and human honourableness through addiction to alcohol and

drugs had to be averted through precept and by example, from top to bottom. Honesty of word and deed, both of the state and the people held a very high premium.

This admonition which the Universal Monarch addresses to his vassals in every region of the world underlies the Buddhist moral philosophy of *Pañca-sīla*. Its brand name matters very little to any one. It is designed and set to serve humanity at large. With a dignified sense of anonymity, let mankind push the frontiers of its ethics to the farthest point we can. It should certainly please the gods above, and much more than should benefit the humans down below.

In Sri Lanka then, let those who have an awareness of these or those who are willing to develop an awareness about these, come forward and claim leadership to clear up these two areas of sex and alcohol abuses which have been absolutely stinking for more than two decades now. Buddhism provides total cover for these under the third and fifth precepts of its *Pañcasīla*. Research in fields of medicine and other sciences in the world today provide abundant evidence for the need of caution, restraint and even total abstinence in the human handling of these dangerously slippery areas. We have listed enough evidence above. In Sri Lanka, whether above board or not, we have much more incriminating evidence relating to both fields, of violence and unpardonable abuses, relating to sex, drugs and alcohol.

In Sri Lanka, let there be no confusion or befuddling of issues with regard to the rightful place offered to Buddhism by the State. In this part of the world where nearly seventy per cent of the population of the land are Buddhist, it has primarily to be the upholding of its unassailable value systems which have gained in the world today universal recognition as being beneficial to all mankind. We know that any one with any sanity or any sense of philanthropy would not stand in the way of this. Every one is waiting for brave and bold action from the top for this massive clean up.

May all beings be well and happy: *Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā.*

